DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 199 EA 019 912

AUTHOR Guzzetti, Barbara J.
TITLE Adaptations of School Effectiveness Research to Practice: A Case Study.
PUB DATE Oct 85
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association (Jackson Hole, WY, October 10-12, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Educational Assessment; Elementary Secondary Education; Inservice Education; Instructional Innovation; *Instructional Leadership; Predictor Variables; Program Effectiveness; *Program Implementation; Research Needs; *School Effectiveness; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Theory Practice Relationship; *Time on Task

ABSTRACT

This case study of a Colorado school district sought to assess the process and outcomes of administrative leadership in implementing school effectiveness research on time-on-task classroom strategies. The study examines the interrelationship of conditions bearing upon the change effort and focuses on those changes affecting the district's personnel, policy, and procedures. The district's program emphasized two related variables that characterize effective schools: teacher and student use of time and the instructional leadership of administrators, particularly in reinforcing teachers; implementation of time on task (engaged time) from classroom observations. The following methods provided the data record: (1) interviews with the superintendent, school administrators, elementary and secondary teachers, and program trainers; (2) verbatim records of an inservice training session; and (3) pertinent documents from school and district sources. Three findings, which emerged from data analyzed by the constant-comparative method, are offered as caveats to other districts implementing school effectiveness programs. First, principals' engaged-rate observations provide little meaningful reward or corrective feedback to teachers. Time spent actively engaged in a task is secondary to its appropriateness and to the student's success. Second, principals' understanding of the instructional process is limited by an emphasis on such observations. Third, the importance of allowing adequate time for the change process is highlighted by this study's results. Researchers cannot produce accurate assessments of school effectiveness programs until consistency in implementation is established across sites. The field's constructs are sufficiently nebulous to cause confusion in interpretation. This investigation demonstrates the need for descriptive studies that offer operational definitions of school effectiveness variables in practice. (CJH)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Barbara J. Guzzetti

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED292199

Adaptations of School Effectiveness Research to Practice: A Case Study

Barbara J. Guzzetti

Assistant Professor

California State Polytechnic University

Teacher Preparation Center

3801 W. Temple Ave.

Pomona, California 91768-4050

(714) 598-4524

Paper Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Northern Rocky Mountain American Educational Research Association, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, October 10-12, 1985.

EA019 912

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Guide

To preserve confidentiality and anonymity, district informants are not cited by name, but by role relations and positions. The following is a key to the shorthand used to distinguish speakers:

S: Superintendent

D: Director of Instruction

C: Consultant

P: Princicpal

T: Teacher

I: Interviewer

EC: Education Commission of the States Rep.

E: Elementary

S: Secondary

OT: Outside Trainer

Adaptations of School Effectiveness Research to Practice: A Case Study

Objectives:

This investigation was undertaken as a project for the National Institute of Education. The purpose of the study was to describe the implementation of school effectiveness research and the effects of that effort in one mid-sized school district in Colorado. The study focused on changes impacting district personnel, policy, and procedures. To provide adequate description, the interrelationship of internal and external conditions that affected that effort was examined. The original study developed: (1) a characterization of the context; (2) a description of the training; (3) an account of the implementation and (4) an assessment of the impact.

Perspective:

The district selectively chose to implement two related variables that characterize effective schools - teacher and student use of time (allocated time, assigned time and engaged time) and administrators' instructional leadership, (particulary in reinforcing teachers' implementation of Time on Task). The district, under mandate from the superintendent, placed a heavy emphasis on developing these two characteristics of effective schools. These variables were chosen for initial implementation because they were relatively easy to put into practice, and because implementation of one reinforced implementation of the other.

As a result, this paper will address the process and outcomes of administrative leadership in implementing Time on Task research.

Methods

Data Collection

Three methods were used to accomplish the objectives of description and assessment, providing triangulation in data collection. First, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the district Superintendent, the Director of Instruction, three elementary principals and two secondary principals. Formal and informal interviews were also conducted with approximately 30 teachers (representing both elementary and secondary levels) and a district itinerant teacher, as well as the original trainers.

Second, verbatim records were gathered from a three-day district inservice conducted by the trainers. Anecdotal observations supplemented formal interviews conducted with the school effectiveness trainers. All observatons were recorded on field-note forms separating comments and inferences from description.

Third, documents were collected at the building and district levels that evidenced the implementation method and the impact of the program. Examples of the types of tools administrators constructed to measure time in its various forms were collected. Samples of policy and procedural memos were also retrieved, constructing a profile of the various forms of implementation.

Data Analysis

All data were transcribed to a visual record. These data were organized by emerging categories and analyzed by the constant-comparative method, as described by Glasser and Strauss (1969). In this analysis, patterns emerged from the extensive data record, generating resulting propositions about the phenomonen under question.

Results

The Context

The context in which the school effectiveness (Time on Task) training was conducted particularly influenced the way in which the research findings were implemented. The district was characterized as a low socio-economic status area, with a student population that typically scored poorly on standardized achievement tests. The Superintendent (Mike), who was relatively new to the district, was characterized as a "direct-driver", determined to impact achievement through innovative applications of research to practice. As a result, principals were "pushed" to become instructional leaders:

> S: I've given a directive that people have to do certain kinds of things and of those the whole effective schools notion fits into it. I'm not saying they all have to do it in a certain way, in a certain time, but I want our administrators to be more academic toward research.

The Superintendent's forceful style of announcing and enacting his expectations affected the implementation of the program:

> S: My role? In this whole thing? I'd like to think that it's been one of seller of the concept, but I know better. It's been much stronger than that. I set an expectation in this district that reseach findings are important, and they ought to be at least looked at, and I think that I'd like to close the gap between what research says we should be doing and what we're doing. I don't see any need to know what we know and not do anything about it.

The Process

"Doing something about it" translated into doing as much as possible within the training period. The format of the inservice involved training a representative cadre of building staff; their responsibility was to train the remainder of their faculty. The rationale for training a cadre of teachers, who would in turn train each other, arose from a desire for total school improvement.

The process of relying upon informed staff to train others resulted in variability in the amount of training teachers and administrators received. Team groups received training directly from the trainers. The rest of the staff received peer-tutoring and peer-teaching, which varied greatly in intensity from building to building.

This method of delivery produced variation in insuring a practice element in the Teaching - Practice - Application - Evaluation model:

I: So what you're saying really is that in the process of doing the effective school's inservice there was no follow up in the classroom in terms of a presentor coming in to work with the teacher?

D: That's correct. The principals who had been part of the team in their observations observed and commented on the kinds of things that had been covered in the inservices. But obviously that varied from principal to principal, building to building and teacher to teacher. So, systematically there was no assurance that the practice element, the controlled practice, was possible.

ET: Their mission was to overhaul the function of teachers and what they're being expected to do. There's a one day inservice, maybe, and then it's "Go do it". No one tells you how to do it.

A lack of observed and reinforced practice produced mistakes in the application of strategies:

OT: The same cycle kids go through to learn a skill, teachers need to go through and they were not getting any feedback. Consequently, some did it right and some did it wrong.

The people that did it wrong didn't get any help; nobody knew they were doing it wrong.

The Implementation

Incorrect implementaton was due in part to flexibility between and among buildings, and to the superintendent's desire to do as much as possible, as quickly as possible. As a result, implementation of Time on Task measurement was mandated on district-wide basis.

Within the concept of examining the use and quality of time, the Time on Task issue became a focal point for the district. Principals were directed by the superintendent to include examination of Time on Task into their classroom observation practices:

P: It was a directive from our Superintendent at our summer orientation. He had just seen enough data that the whole Time on Task issue was having pretty positive effects on achievement. It was clear in his mind we had to do something with it. So, that's how we got started.

OT: Unbeknownst to us, we now know it, but at the time we didn't know it, Mike demanded of all his principals that as a part of their clinical supervision activities they install rigid observation procedures to determine Time on Task.

Principals have followed the directive to incorporate Time on Task into observational practices. They have been and are continuing to develop tools to assist them in these efforts:

D: Our principals this year have as a major focus of their evaluation the measurement of Time on Task. They are in the process of developing instruments, computer programs, and other ways of gathering, storing and analyzing that type of data.

Learning the skills of instructional leadership implies a process of acquiring knowledge and skill. The principal becomes a learner, who reflects stages of development. Among the learners, variability exists in reaching the application level of information processing:

S: You can ask principals, "If you see "X" what then?" Some of them will speak intelligently about that and some will have difficulty.

The expectation to perform at a level of sophistication not yet attained left principals feeling frustrated and inadequate:

I: Do you feel a push for instructional leadership in this district?

EP: yes, very much so. It's not just a push, it's a crunch.

HSP: I like to think I've been doing it(observation/evaluation) to a degree that's acceptable, but I'm not satisfied. I can demonstrate to you or to any one else that I've been in classrooms for the purposes of observing instruction, but I'm not satisfied with the kind of impact I've had because in some cases I feel like I haven't had any.

I: Why not?

P: I wish I knew...there are times when I really feel inadequate by not being able to offer a suggestion.

The Time on Task research became the solution to the problem of principals not being able to offer a suggestion for a teacher's improvement. The Superintendent also wanted to insure that Time on Task not been seen as a fad. For these reasons, principals were directed to measure Time on Task during classroom observations. The result of this mandate accomplished the objective of teachers seeing the Time on Task training as a serious effort, but it also had the effect of producing widespread fears, complaints, and criticisms:

ET: Time On Task as a evaluation tool is unfair. There are times when kids can't be on task. If a kid goes to the bathroom, the teacher gets penalized.

C: I see teachers in tears. If you looked at the Time on Task scores and you knew the teachers, you'd think there was a big discrepancy.

ST: Time on Task observations do not consider the kid staring out the window may be reflectively thinking. Isn't that what we want?

ET: By itself, (Time on Task) it stinks. It doesn't look at the quality of activities, the objectives.

ET: Principals should ask the kids what they're doing. Just because a kid is poring liquid from one beaker into another doesn't mean the kid is learning. I ask kids when I go into a classroom what they're doing.

ST: I asked the principal "What does this score mean?" He could only answer me back by saying that there's a correlation statistically between the amount of time students spend on a task and the amount of learning - whatever that means.

T: I didn't care for the way (Time on Task) was presented or enforced. I felt like a prisioner;

not free to be human with the kids, just concerned with pencil and paper tasks.

Although principals deny incorporation of Time on Task into district evaluation, in teachers' minds observation is synonomous with evaluation. The fact that a score results from Time on Task measurements creates problems:

ST: If you get less than an 88%, you feel like a failure.

ET: Can you imagine what it must be like for a teacher who is up for tenure and the score gets sent into the central office?

I: Is there a certain score you try to shoot for?

SP: It's a number. It's like taking a temperature. It makes them uncomfortable.

Within each school teachers have figured out the types of activities they can conduct with students that will insure their obtaining a high score on Time on Task measures according to the way the principal measures it in their buildings:

ST: To get a high score on Time on Task you give a lecture. I've taught for 14 years

and I've never seen so much lecturing in my life!

ET: When my coordinator came out to do the Time on Task observation, I gave two tests in a row. I got 100% on Time on Task.

RT: In our building we give a pencil and paper activity, a worksheet, or we give a test to get a high score.

I: Do teachers who lecture come out with higher scores on Time on Task because they can monitor what's going on?

SP: Probably, yes.

ET: I feel that on days a teacher knew he or she was to be evaluated, a change was made in what normally would have been taught, because the educator was worried about evaluation, and was thinking of an activity where all kids would do busy work, instead of the normal interactions in a more relaxed, flexible learning situation.

P: I wouldn't generally observe a teacher when she's giving a test. I did that with a 3rd grade teacher and she

was engaged 100% of the time and her students were engaged 100% of the time. There was nobody off task. I had to leave because there was nothing I was measuring.

Because principals did not receive any inservice training on methods of incorporating Time on Task into observation practices confusion and inconsistency in implementation resulted:

SP: I need to get into it in more depth. Is a two minute module sufficient? I understand there are some principals who observe for Time on Task and that's the primary purpose of the observation.

SP: In talking to some of my elementary colleagues I found out, for example, if a teacher takes time out to say, "Gee, that was well done", that actually is looked upon by some people as off-task. We just haven't been through that.

SP: The hang-up came in our first week of Time on Task observation. The assistant principal happened to notice that while kids were doing some individual seatwork in a social studies class, the teacher was correcting papers. His interpretation was that the teacher was

off task. Student On-Task rating was about 90%; teacher On-Task was less than 50%. We had a problem with that; I think we still do. We need some direction. Does the Time on Task concept include teacher behavior, Barb?

EP: I'd like to know to a greater degree what's expected of us in terms of Assigned Time as opposed to Engaged Time. I think that area would help clear up some things.

The reason the Time on Task issue became a mandated focus can be explained in terms of what is operational and what is measurable:

OT: When we did the training, of course, we stressed over and over again, that it is not Time on Task, it is successful engagement on-task that is the crucial variable. But, as in almost all districts, the simplifying process occurs, and the focus is on the Time on Task stuff; they make it like a ritual...you can get your hands on Time on Task, you can look at it. Nobody can do anything about measuring the success rate... I think that's an example of how you fall back on the things that are understandable and easy to deal with.

Impact

The total impact of the program was exemplified through changed attitudes toward teaching emphasizing instruction as technology. From this perspective instruction became less of an art and more of a craft--definable, describable, and replicable, through a shared language.

The technological gift of a shared language created possibilities in shaping a new view of instructional reality:

S: Principals have a way of haloing teachers. "You're a great teacher, Barb, and there's no question, we don't even have to discuss what "great" means because every time I talk about Barbara, I'm going to refer to you as "You're really top notch". Now, how the Hell that happens, I don't know, but the halo effect applies. So we started visiting some of our "great" teachers. The assigned task was reading and the teacher was working with a group in reading (and we did a lot of grouping and still do) and the other kids--some are working on math, some are not working at all. And you know what happens; there are kids doing "seatwork" as we call it, and some aren't doing anything.

In addition to providing a shared view of the instructional world, technological language provided other gifts, the tools to measure that reality:

S: Some of our buildings designed their own instrumentation (to measure Time on Task). I could show you where people have even computerized it, and they have it on the micro, and they can call it up anytime.

S: Principals shared instrumentation, and just techniques generally. If they were going in specifically to look at Time on Task, they generated many, many different instruments.

The acquired language that raised technological awareness to the level of practice produced a need for additional terminology and tools to define and refine instructional practices:

EP: What I've concluded from what I've measured to this point is, that aside from one time a year, and aside from any teacher who shows a low engaged rate or academic efficiency rating, I don't need to measure Time on Task anymore. What I'd like to concentrate on is interactive feedback, and the success of kids, and observe some other things with some other tools.

Incorporation of School Effectiveness findings produced observable changes in behavior and attitudes at the classroom level; resulting changes in teacher action facilitated changes in student performance:

> S: We did show positive effects from the first year study, through classroom observations. We did have an improvement in Time on Task utilizing some of the methodology suggested in the workshops. We did see some increase in test scores. And, on the other hand, we did see some things that showed no effect of the treatment. Teachers didn't change their style, as much as they were interested and bought into the concept; when they actually got in front of kids, they continued to do the kinds of things they always did. But, not as a whole. All the findings suggest the training did make a difference.

Educational Significance:

Findings from this study offer three caveats to other districts implementing school effectiveness programs. First, we have found that used in isolation, engaged-rate observations offer little meaningful reward or corrective feedback to teachers. It is relatively easy to manipulate an artificial situation which produces spuriously high engaged ratings. It appears that the

time spent actively engaged in a task is secondary to the appro priateness of the task, and the student's success.

Second, an emphasis on Time on Task observations limited principals' understandings of the instructional process, producing a "factory-model" of the school as an organization. Both teachers and administrators recognized the resulting lack of diagnostic/ prescriptive information contributing to professional growth.

Third, findings from this study highlight the importance of allowing adequate time for the change process. Time must be given to implementors (teachers and administrators) to practice the innovation, before assessment and evaluation is undertaken, either at the building or the district level. Provisions must be made for on-site follow-through, to provide direct assistance in implementation. This effort should be a dual responsibility between trainers and implementors. Care should be taken to ensure consistency in implementation and appropriate adaptations of training content.

As researchers and evaluators, we cannot hope to produce credible assessments of school effectiveness programs until uniformity and consistency in implementation across sites is established. The constructs of school effectiveness are still nebulous enough to cause confusion in interpretation. Findings from this investigation illustrate the need for descriptive studies, offering operational definitions of school effectiveness variables in practice.